

## The mental wellbeing of prospective international students

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# The mental wellbeing of prospective international students:

Key findings from a collaboration between Bupa and QS Enrolment Solutions' 2019 International Student Survey

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 **ENROLMENTSOLUTIONS**

# Background



- Published data concerning the mental wellbeing of international and overseas students (OS) are scarce
- This is an important issue because international and OS are a known risk group
- The current study concerns pre-departure student prospect mental wellbeing risk
- This study leveraged the 2019 QSES International Student Survey

## **This is the first study to:**

1. Explore mental wellbeing in a sample of prospective international and overseas students (OS) (known as 'pre-departure')
2. Quantify pre-departure levels of life satisfaction, trait level anxiety, stress, loneliness, felt pressure to succeed in future studies abroad and social support
3. Identify differences in the pre-departure mental wellbeing profile of international and OS prospects according to their age, gender, nationality / country of origin, intended level of study and intended area of study

# QSES SERVICES

## LEAD MANAGEMENT

Maximise completed applications by connecting with and nurturing leads

## APPLICATION SUPPORT

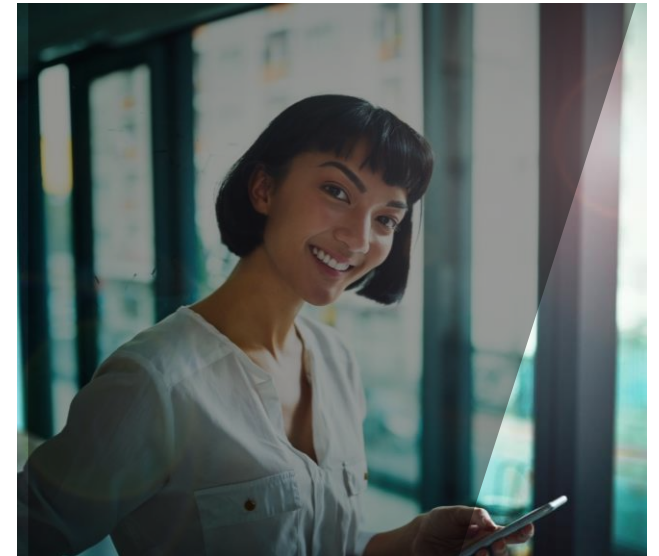
Prioritise assessment ready applications to ensure quick turn around times

## OFFER CONVERSION

Optimise enrolment conversion through multi-channel engagement and case management

## ENGAGEMENT & RETENTION

Build rapport and connect students to relevant support services



# QSES INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY

77K

Responses from around the globe

29K

Considering studying in Australia

22

Participating Australian institutions

193

Countries represented in the survey

**WHAT** do prospective students value when making decisions on where and what to study?

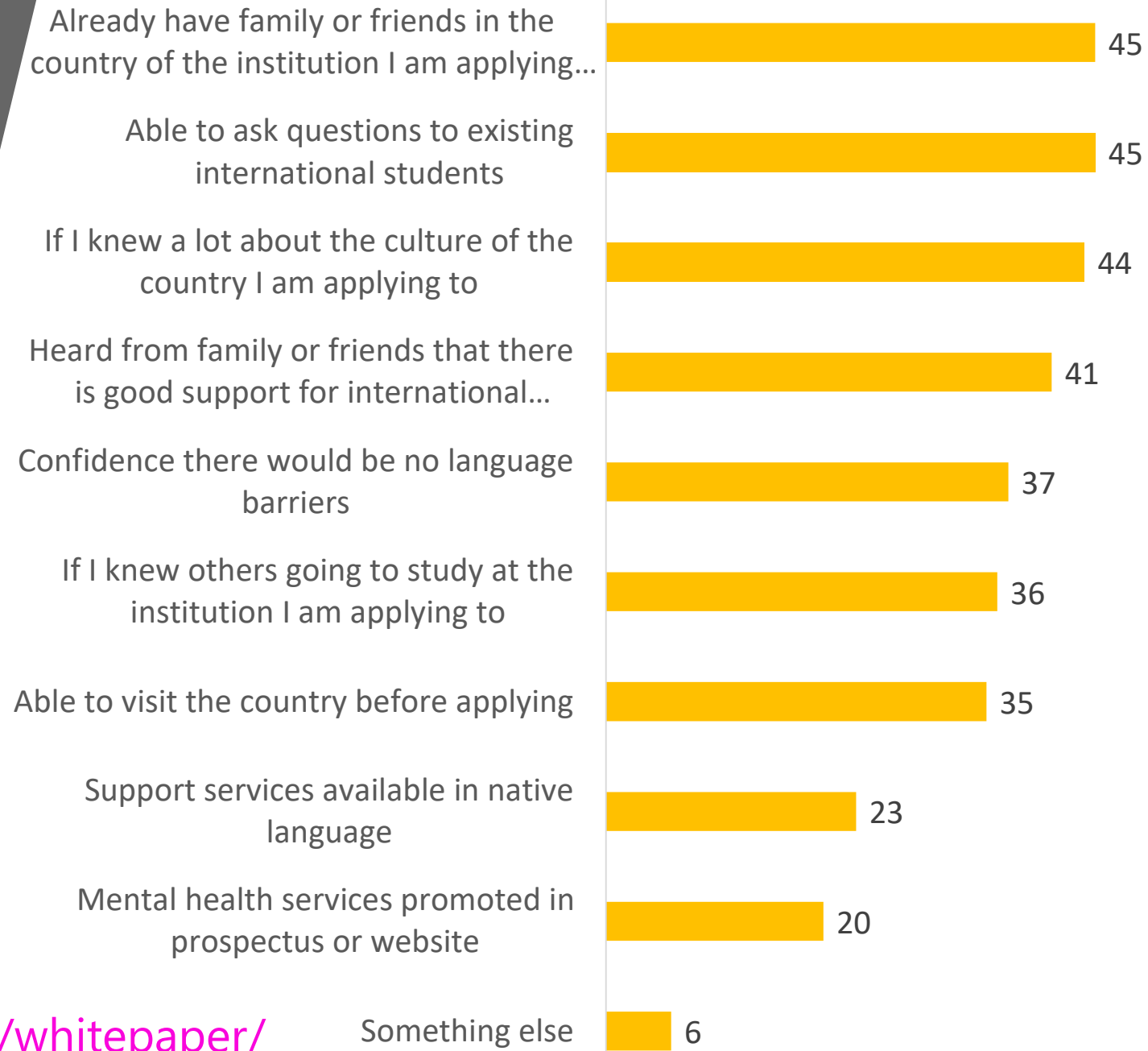
**HOW** can institutions effectively communicate with prospective students?

**WHERE** do prospective students want to end up after they've finished their studies?

# What are prospective students most worried about?



# What kind of services would make them less worried?



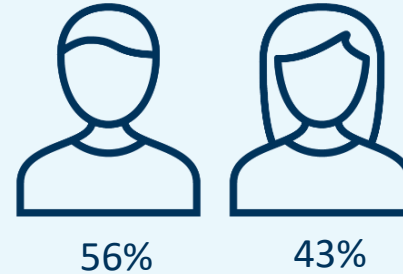
# Participant demographics

**12,204**  
Participants

**175**  
Countries

- India (11.0%)
- Pakistan (9.4%)
- China (8.9)

## Gender



## Age

Average age: 24.4 years  
SD age: 6.6 years  
Age range: 16-58 years

## Level of study

Postgrad (coursework) - 37%  
Undergrad – 35%  
Postgrad (research) – 21%

## Type of study

Business & Admin (22%)  
Engineering (15%)  
Maths & Comp. Sciences (8.5%)

## State of interest

Victoria – 34.8%  
New South Wales – 30.6%  
Queensland – 21.6%  
ACT – 7.4%  
South Australia – 4.2%  
Western Australia – 1.4%

**22**

Participating educational  
institutions & colleges



# Life satisfaction

*How satisfied are you with your life as a whole?*

*0 = No satisfaction at all*

*10 = Completely satisfied*

*\*All scores converted onto standardised 0-100 point scale*



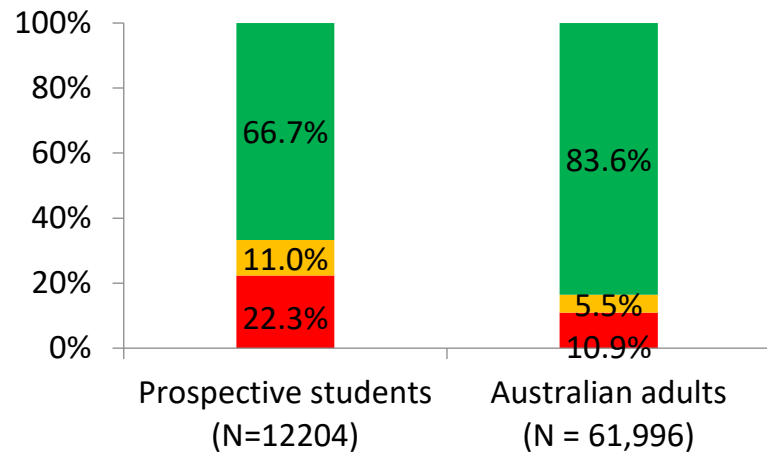
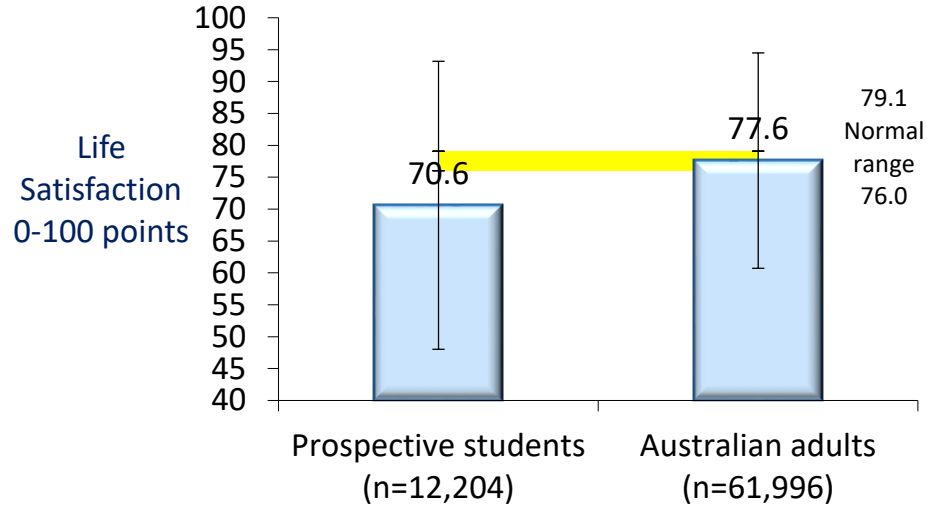
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# Life satisfaction compared to Australian adult normative data

How satisfied are you with your life as a whole?

(0 = Not at all satisfied; 100 = Completely satisfied)



■ 0-50 (high-risk) ■ 60 (challenged) ■ 70+ (normal)

- Average life satisfaction for prospective students (70.6 points) is statistically **significantly lower** than the Australian adult average (77.6 points); and **below** the Australian adult normative range of between 76.0-79.1 points
- Prospective students (22.3%) are **2x more likely** than Australian adults (10.9%) to be depressed / high depression risk
- Only two thirds (66.7%) of prospective students scored in the normal 70+ point range on the measure of life satisfaction, compared to 83.8% of Australian adults

## Trait negative affect

*How [lonely, stressed, anxious] do you generally feel?’*

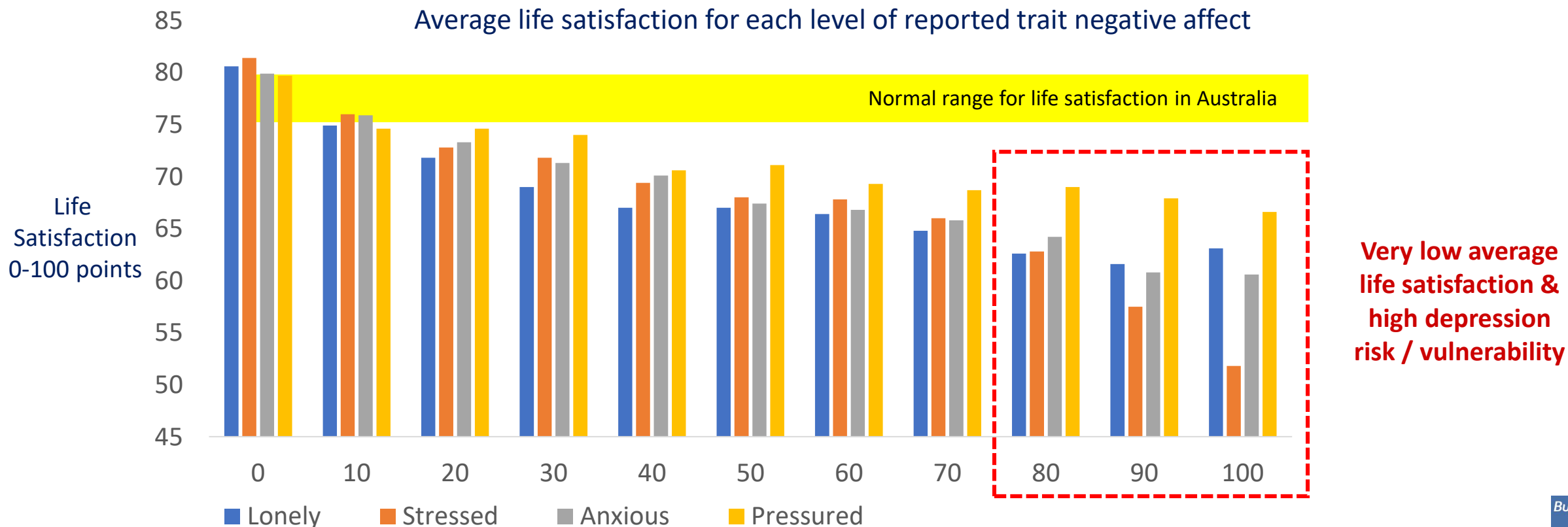
*‘How pressured do you feel to succeed in your future studies in another country?’*

*0 = Not at all*

*10 = Extremely*

# The relationship between trait negative affect and life satisfaction

- The figure below shows that average life satisfaction decreases with increasing levels of trait negative affect across all four affects
- Approximately **1 in 10** reported **extreme levels** of **loneliness, stress and anxiety** (80-100 points)
- Approximately **1 in 4** reported an **extreme level** of **pressure** to succeed in their future studies in another country (90-100 points)



How [lonely, stressed, anxious] do you generally feel? (0 = Not at all; 100 = extremely)

How pressured do you feel to succeed in your future studies in another country? (0 = Not at all; 100 = Extremely)

# Social support

*I can get help from a friend, family or neighbour when needed?*

*Yes, definitely*

*Sometimes*

*Rarely*

*Never*

Bupa

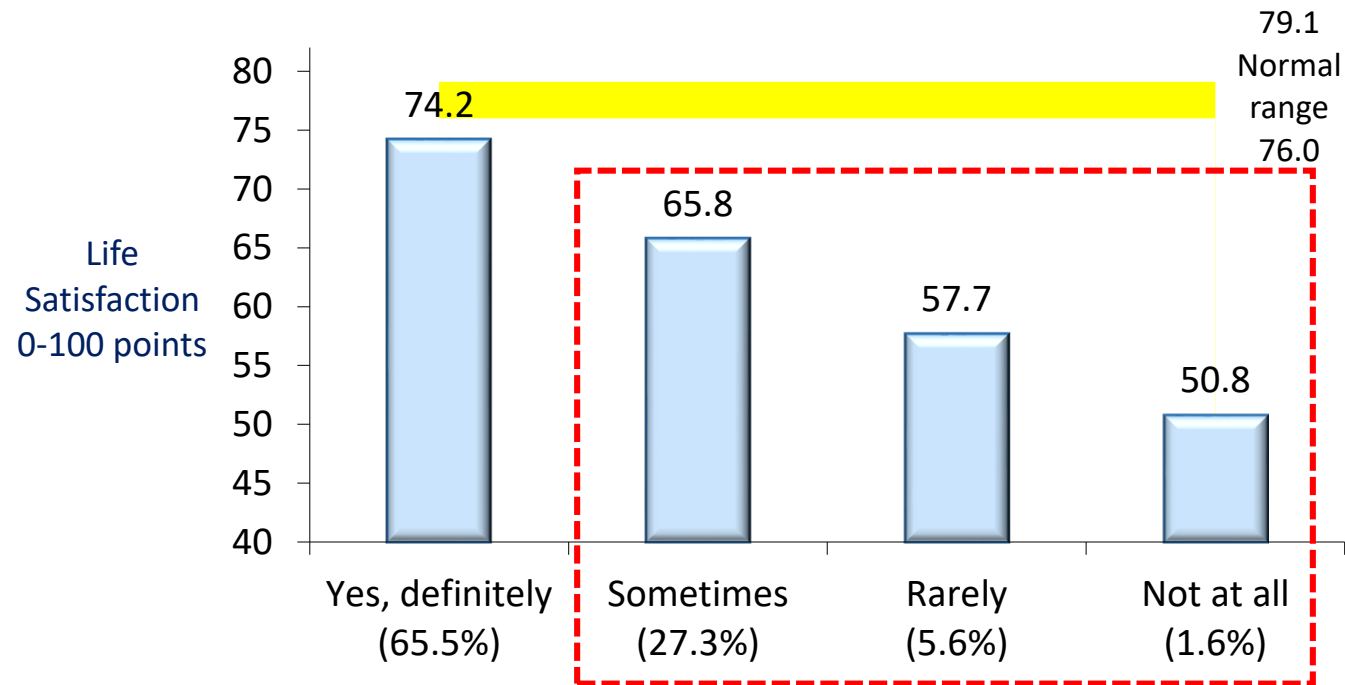
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# Social support and life satisfaction



- 65.5% responded 'Yes, definitely' to the question 'I can get help from friends, family or neighbor when needed' – their average life satisfaction is almost within normal range
- 34.5% are not certain that they could access social support in a time of need – these people have very low corresponding average life satisfaction



**Very low average life satisfaction & high depression risk / vulnerability**

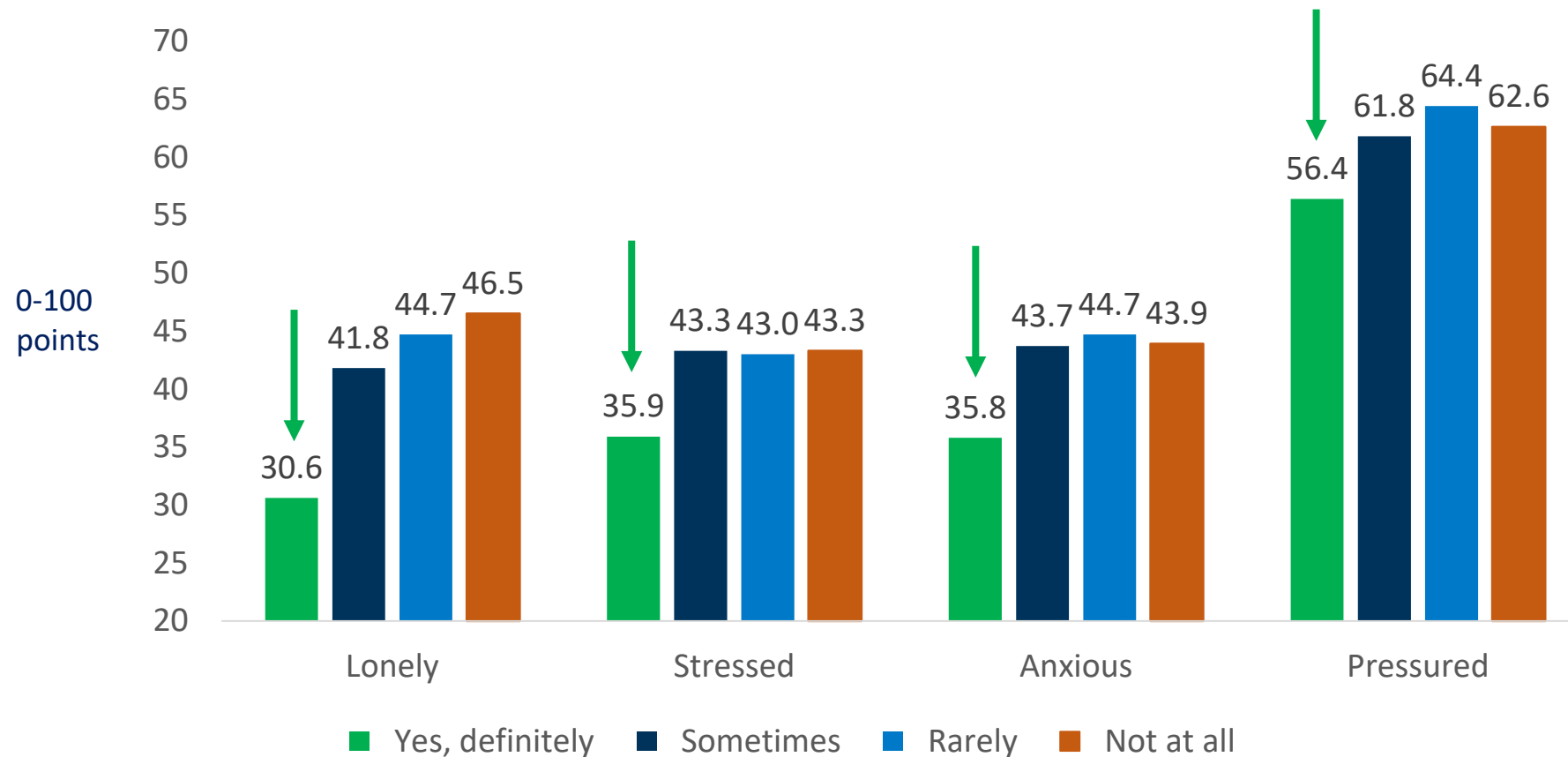
*I can get help from a friend, family member or neighbour when needed*

# Other interesting observations



## Social support and trait negative affectivity

- High social support accessibility is associated with substantially lower average trait negative affect
- Social support likely plays a key role in alleviating / 'buffering' people from feelings of distress

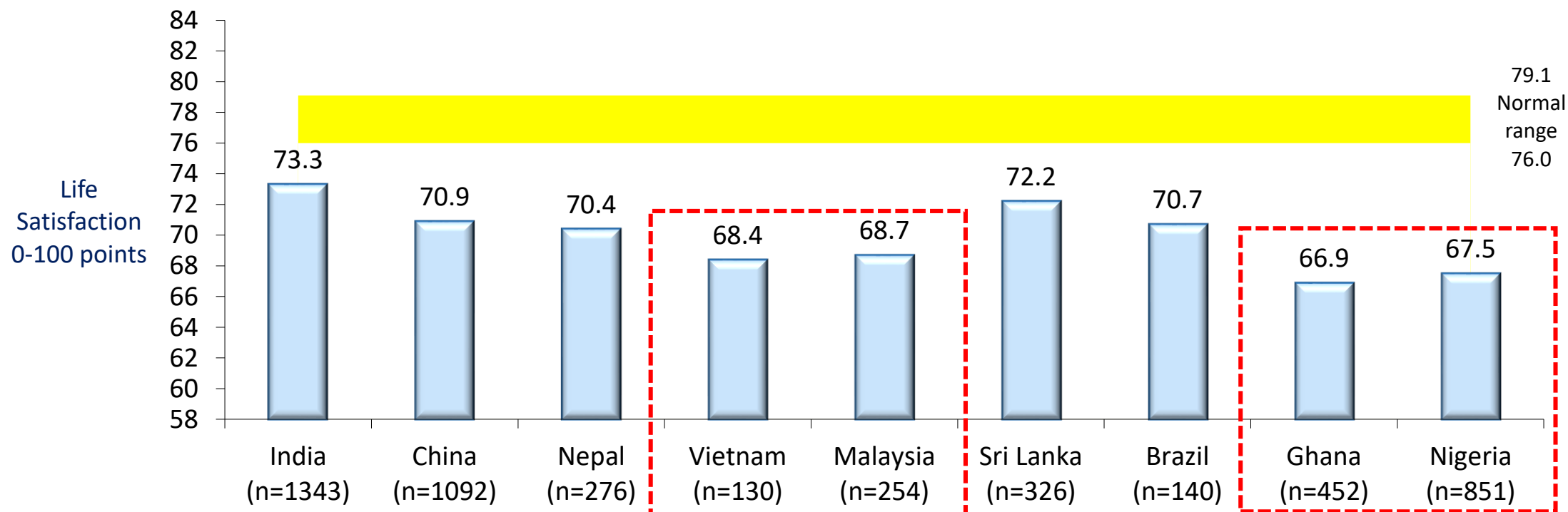


# Other interesting observations



## Nationality / country of origin and life satisfaction

- This figure shows average life satisfaction for some of Australia's largest enrollment groups and emerging markets
- All average scores are below the Australian adult normative range
- Some between country variation in average life satisfaction
- Higher risk among student prospects from Ghana, Nigeria, Vietnam and Malaysia



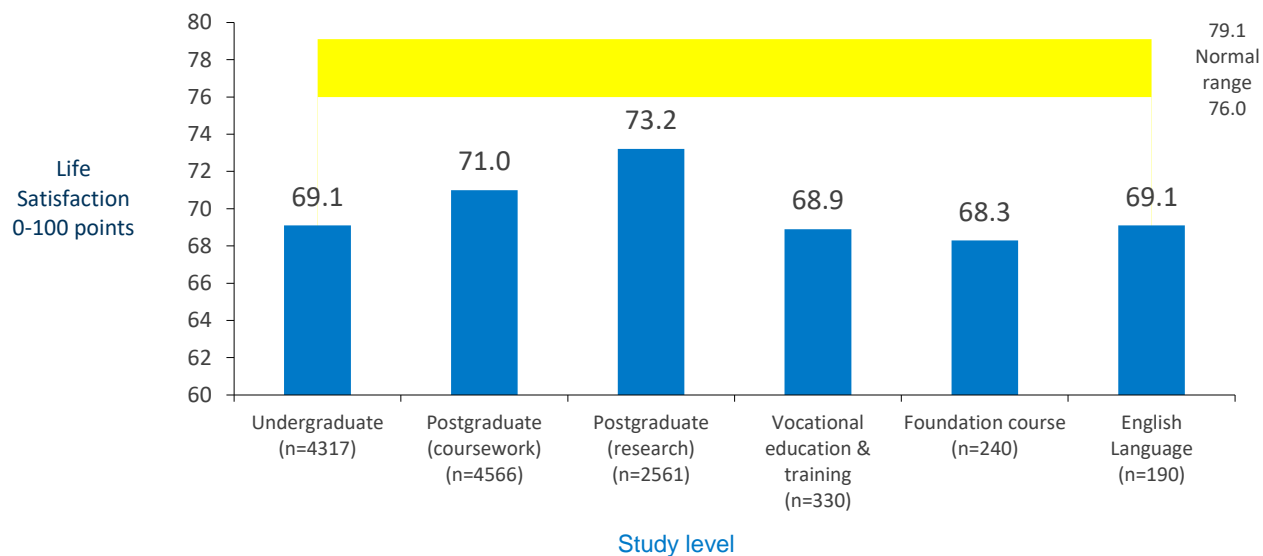


# Other interesting observations



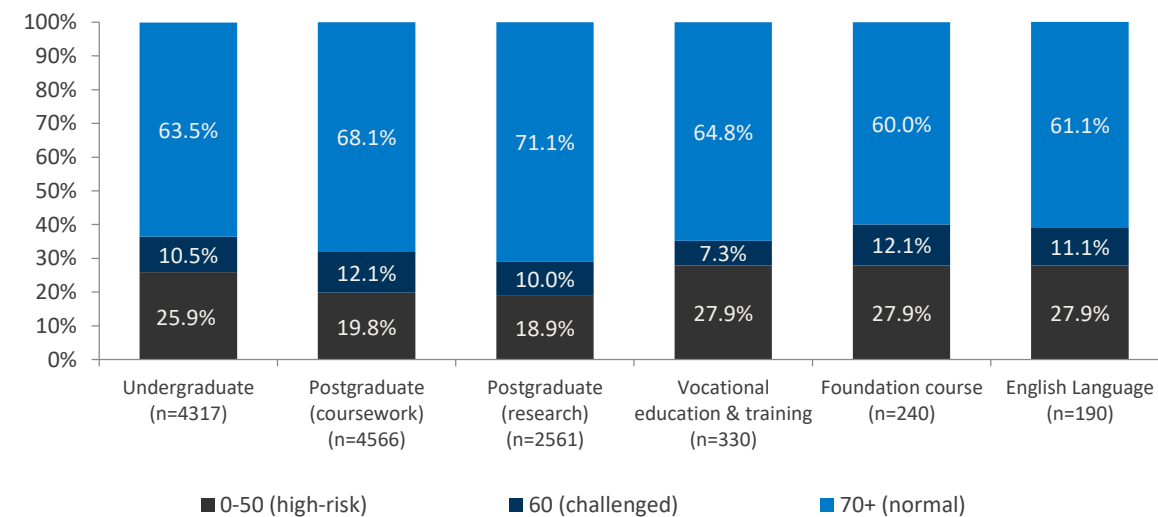
## Study level and average life satisfaction

- Average life satisfaction is highest among the post-graduate research group and lowest among the foundation course group
- Average scores across all three non-tertiary groups and the undergraduate group are below 70 points



## Study level and low life satisfaction / depression risk

- Less than 1 in 5 (18.9%) post-graduate research student prospects has very low life satisfaction compared to 1 in 4 (25.9%) undergraduate student prospects
- More than 1 in 4 (27.9%) student prospects across all three non-tertiary groups has very low life satisfaction



# Summary & implications



- International students are a risk group before they arrive in Australia to study:
  - Two times the risk for very low life satisfaction and depression compared to the Australian population
  - Significant proportions scoring very-high to extreme levels of loneliness, stress, anxiety and felt pressure to succeed
  - More than one third reported perceptions of limited accessibility to social support in a time of need
- This research has major implications for the education sector and their partners / stakeholders as:
  - Student welfare
  - Overwhelming, growing (and perhaps underutilized) demand for on-campus counselling and medical services
  - Interventions and initiatives to better support students, better manage and reduce the impact of mental illness
  - Early intervention and help-seeking
  - Student educational attainment - including attrition and associated loss of income

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